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July 20, 1912.

**e Place of Women
the Modern National
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LONDON

STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT

93 CHANCERY LANE, W.C.

The Place of Women in the Modern National Movements of the East

BY

AGNES DE SÉLINCOURT

PRINCIPAL OF THE LADY MUIR TRAINING SCHOOL
ALLAHABAD, INDIA

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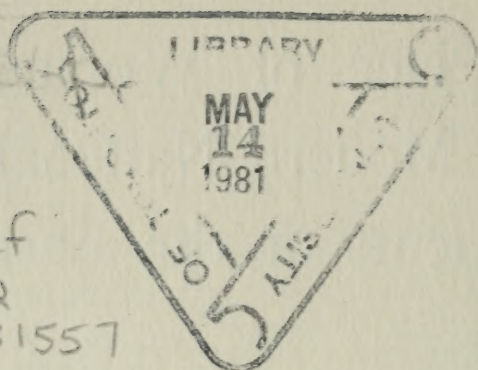
"THE INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF MISSIONS"

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In connection with this pamphlet, *The Call of the East : some suggestions to University Women as to the choice of a Career*, and *Womanhood in the East*, by Miss A. W. Richardson, Vice-President of Westfield College, should also be read. Both are sold by the Student Christian Movement, 93 Chancery Lane, London, W.C. Price 2d. each.

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JUL 16 1964

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The Place of Women in the Modern National Movements of the East

By AGNES DE SÉLINCOURT

PRINCIPAL OF THE LADY MUIR TRAINING SCHOOL, ALLAHABAD, INDIA

"You know," said an old Mohammedan Sheikh as he somewhat timorously contemplated the prospect of modern education for his little girl, "you know, we do not care to have our daughters stay in school very long." "Oh, but all that is past," broke in a young Moslem B.A., who had ventured within the Mission precincts on a similar errand; "our country can never be great until our women are properly taught."

So the old and the new are meeting to-day in the East; the clash of conflicting theories as to woman's rightful place in the life of a nation is one of the forces which is shaking society to its foundations. Not in one country alone is this phenomenon observable; wherever the East is being touched with the breath of awakening life, the woman's question leaps into prominence.

With the proclamation of the Constitution in Turkey in August 1908, thousands of women threw off their veils and streamed into the streets with their husbands to join in the general shout of "Liberty." Though this proved to be a premature attempt and the women

have since been forced back into their former seclusion, yet below the surface the ferment continues unabated, and it cannot be long before the social life of Turkey is transformed. The last few years have seen the birth of a national consciousness in Persia, and with it there also an awakening has begun among the women. In one town alone a hundred schools for girls have been opened within a year ; in one of the largest a mother was found sitting in the same class with her two daughters, the youngest a child of seven. In China, also, schools for girls are springing up like mushrooms in almost every province, and though, owing to the lack of qualified teachers, much of the work that is being done is almost comically crude, yet the pathos of these women's eagerness turns laughter into something nearer tears.

In India, of which I wish principally to speak, side by side with the growth of national ideals and aspirations, the woman's question grows steadily in importance. In a district of Eastern Bengal with a population of 850,000 where, six years ago, there were four girls' schools, to-day there are 300. From the Government Quinquennial Review of Education in India (1902-7) we find that while the chief increase in female education has taken place in Bengal and Eastern Bengal and Assam, yet there is no province in which there has not been advance during the past quinquennium. Of the United Provinces, which is the most backward part of India in the matter of female education, the Report runs as follows : " It is true that the vast mass of the people are as indifferent, apathetic, and perhaps as prejudiced as ever, nevertheless the outstanding fact remains that the percent-

age of girls attending school to the female population of school-going age has very nearly doubled. It is satisfactory also to find that the increase has been general throughout the Province."

Not only in the quickly increasing percentage of girls attending school do we find traces of the new spirit, but in every department of social life. Clubs are being started, women's periodicals launched, philanthropic activities undertaken, all carried on by Indian women for Indian women. One of the most significant movements of the kind is the Bharat Stri Mahamandal, a Society formed in the United Provinces last winter by some of the most advanced Hindu and Moslem women in the Empire. The following extracts are from the inaugural address given at the meeting of the Mahamandal: "'The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.' It is to make ourselves worthy and efficient rulers, to equip ourselves with the fitting of sound rulers, to have our Indian social world better governed, that the Bharat Stri Mahamandal has been founded. No nation can rise above the spirit of its women. If that spirit be asleep the nation can never be wide awake. Thus the Bharat Stri Mahamandal is to form a common centre for all women thinkers and women workers of every race, creed, class, and party in India, to associate themselves together for the progress of humanity. The secretaries and members of the executive body are always to be chosen from the Hindu (including Sikh, Jain, etc.), Mussulman, Buddhist, and Parsi women of India. A certain number of 'helpers' are to be selected from the Anglo-Indian and Christian members who join the Mahamandal. Their function will be to help the

executive body by suggestions and ideas which are expected to be stored up in them by their greater experience in these lines of work, also to co-operate with us in any other way found practicable."

Those who know something of social conditions in the East even ten years ago will realize the swiftness and the significance of the appearance of these phenomena ; one cannot but feel a measure of sympathy with the alarm and hesitancy of the old Sheikh and his *confrères*, as they watch the old order changing, and wonder whereunto this will grow. Times of transition are always difficult, and the changes which we see taking place in the thoughts and ideals and opportunities of Eastern women are such as cannot but give food for serious reflection. And yet the dangers of advance can only be met by still further advance. Surely there are none who care for the progress of humanity whose hearts do not throb in sympathy with these women, struggling—sometimes crudely, often mistakenly and yet passionately and sincerely—for light and knowledge and liberty, who would not respond to the appeal lately expressed by a Hindu lady before a Western audience : " It is clear that our advance as Indian women must be based on our national literature, our national history, our national ideals. In working out its steps, we need sympathy, we need the fellowship of all the noble women of the world."

Christian missionaries have played a larger part than any other body in bringing about this awakening. During the greater part of the nineteenth century they stood well-nigh alone in the East in their championship of the woman's cause ; with the result that until quite

recent years it was practically only in the Christian Church that women of culture and education were to be found, and even yet the vast majority of the women leaders in the East are Christian. But a realization of the necessity for an educated and emancipated womanhood is now no longer confined to those sections of the community which are directly influenced by Christianity, but is laying hold of Eastern nations as a whole. The times are moving and we must move with them, if we would enable the Christian women of the East to preserve, and yet further to strengthen their present position of leadership. If the Christian Church is to make any adequate attempt to meet the present need of the non-Christian world, it would seem to be imperative that she devote some of her best thinking to the solution of the problems which are involved in the following questions: What is the message of Christianity to the awakening womanhood of the East? How may that message be most wisely and effectively delivered?

What is the message of Christianity to the modern woman?

The phrase "modern woman" is not so incongruous in connection with the East as may at first sight appear, for in the matter of women's problems, as in other directions, the leaders of the Eastern nations are at the present time assimilating Western ideas with startling rapidity, and the woman's question, like so many other social questions, is becoming every day more and more obviously related in the East and the West. Some whose main interest lies in the work of the Christian Church abroad have perhaps hardly realized the quiet revolution which has taken place in

England during the last half-century in the position of women, and the manifold problems which are arising as a result of it.¹ But modern missionary work needs to be reviewed in close relation to these problems, even as they need to be thought out in the light cast upon them by the work of the missionary abroad, and both in the light of a careful survey of the causes and effects of woman's progress or retrogression from the beginnings of history up to the present time, and the bearing of her evolution upon the life of nations.

One fruitful line of study, for example, would be that of the position of women in medieval times, as compared with their position after the Reformation. The conventual ideal made possible for women a career greater in many respects than any other which has been thrown open to them in the whole course of modern European history, and found its fullest exemplification in such women as St Hilda of Whitby, or the Abbess of Las Huelgas in Spain. In post-Reformation days, on the other hand, in the reaction from the evils of the monastic system supreme stress was laid upon the sanctity of the home, with the result, among other and nobler ones, that for generations marriage became woman's only recognized vocation. A careful study of Eastern history along similar lines is also essential; we must not allow the present backward condition of women in the East to blind us to the fact that it numbers among its great ones in the past women such as Rani Devi, the wife of the Emperor Asoka, and Lilavati, daughter and disciple of the famous mathematician, Bhashkaracharya.

¹ Cf. Sir Oliver Lodge in his Preface to *The Position of Woman—Actual and Ideal*. Nisbet & Co.

The East has much to teach us of the glory of motherhood, despite the fact that over-emphasis of that one side, great though it be, of woman's life is largely responsible for the degradation of widows and childless wives, and other social evils which enlightened Indians deplore as sincerely as we do. Ancient Indian poetry reaches its highest level in its portraiture of such exquisite women characters as Sita, Damayanti, or Sakuntala.

Whatever be the message we would take to the East, it must at least be great enough to include all that is true in every past conception of woman and in every aspiration that is stirring among women to-day. A great part of the present difficulty lies in the fact that neither woman's capabilities nor her limitations are known as yet, nor can they be fully known until she has had opportunity to find herself. Then, and not till then, temperamental characteristics will tell, and there will be a clearing up of the present confusion between accidental and essential difference. Meanwhile there is a spirit of unrest among women all the world over, a reaching out after a freer, fuller life ; and it must never be forgotten that a free, full life for women is an integral part of the reign of God upon earth, which our Lord came to establish. The messengers of the Cross must accept and encourage the highest aspirations of women, seeking the solution of confusing and apparently contradictory elements in the light of the fundamental teaching of Christ that life comes through death, self-realization through self-sacrifice. It is comparatively easy to push to an extreme, but the perfect and more difficult way is to bring both extremes to a golden mean, to combine

freedom with self-imposed restrictions, and enthusiasm with sanity. One main justification for the missionary enterprise lies in the conviction that Christianity alone, among all the religions and philosophies of the world, holds the key to the right solution of the relations between men and women. But our presentation of Jesus Christ in this as in every direction must be made in a spirit of deep humility, realizing how far short we in the West still fall of His teaching and His life, and how only as the East brings in its contribution can we rise to a perfected humanity in Him.

How at this time may our message be most wisely and effectively given ?

There seems little doubt that our main opportunity at the present moment lies along the line of education ; it is in this more than in any other direction that the East is looking to us for help. The education of women in India, for example, has now reached a point not dissimilar from the crisis which confronted that of men some fifty years ago when Dr Duff's epoch-making work was done. Whether we will or no, upon us Westerners must rest very largely the responsibility of determining the lines along which the education of the rising generation of Eastern women shall be carried out. The next ten years will see the beginnings of many things in the women's educational world in the East. It is of the greatest importance to guard against a hasty and wholesale adoption of Western methods. The need of the present crisis can only be fully met as those in the front rank of education in the West, in consultation with leaders of Eastern thought, plan out some system of education which shall be true to the genius of the East, and in which

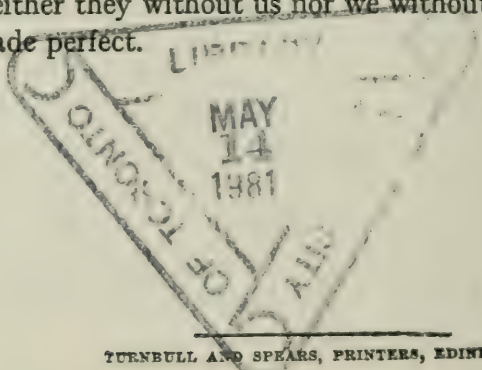
a due place shall be given to those other elements in education, such as manual, industrial, and domestic training, which are necessary, besides the purely intellectual, for balance of character and a sane outlook upon life.

Upon us also rests the solemn responsibility of determining whether this education shall be imbued with a partly materialistic, partly agnostic spirit, or with the spirit of Christ. With the entrance of Western science and Western civilization the old faiths are rapidly losing their power for guidance and restraint, and nothing could be more disastrous at the present time than the diffusion in the East of the merely material benefits of Western civilization apart from the spiritual ideals of Christianity, in the atmosphere of which all that is best in modern progress has developed.

Facts such as these constitute a strong appeal to the leaders of women's education in England. Only those who have had to guide modern educational thought can understand the need for sound principles by which to direct the new, and sometimes vehement and confused aspirations of the races undergoing this rapid transformation. If Christian schools are to be maintained at the highest level, and are to meet the complex needs of growing nations, it is essential that they shall be under the supervision of women who bring to the work not only a deep sense of vocation, but also an expert knowledge of modern educational methods. So far this necessity has been more generally recognized in the case of men; many mission schools and colleges have been staffed by men with high university honours and a statesmanlike breadth

of outlook. Women of corresponding equipment are needed for the women's work if this is to be in any sense adequate. They will have to deal with complicated problems, organize schools, draft policies, train teachers, learn to adapt Western methods to the Eastern mind, and inspire others to undertake a fresh study of child nature, and of such educational aims as are best for the country of their adoption. Hence the need of many more women of the highest educational faculty to guide this work in mission fields.

Surely for many, very many, the will of God must point Eastwards. He has a place for each. Is it not possible that some have too hastily assumed that the land of their birth must of necessity be the divinely appointed land of their life work? Undoubtedly there are many whose vocation lies at home. Their contribution to the missionary enterprise is no less a vital one. An intelligent and sympathetic interest in the great problems of the East on the part of women engaged in educational work at home cannot fail to have deep and far-reaching consequences. The world is one, and the work is one. Now, more than ever, East and West are acting and reacting on one another, and their destinies are indissolubly bound together. Neither they without us nor we without them shall be made perfect.



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